

7. Hillenbrand devotes time to the difficulty of veterans' re-entering life after the war. She says, "there was no one right way to peace; each man had to find his own path." What is Zamperini's path? How does his conversion under Billy Graham help him? What role does his wife, Cynthia, play?

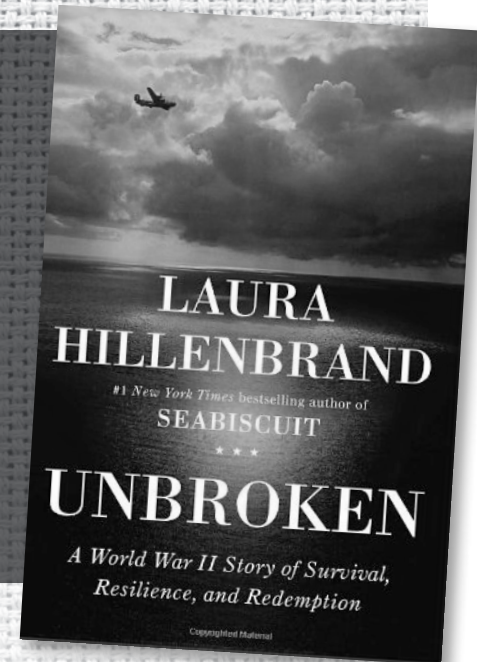
8. Follow-up to Question 7: Why, after World War II, did the medical profession fail to acknowledge Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? After all, this was the mid-20th century, and psychiatry was a fairly established discipline. Plus, the horrors of World War I were only one generation behind. What took so long?

9. Unbroken is a classic inspirational story, but it lies somewhat on the surface, offering little in the way of psychological depth. Do you wish there were more introspection in Zamperini's account? Or do you feel this story is rich enough as it is?

Discussion Questions

"Extraordinarily moving...
a powerfully drawn
survival epic."

- *The Wall Street Journal*



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Laura Hillenbrand is an American author of books and magazine articles. Born in Fairfax, Virginia, Hillenbrand spent much of her childhood riding bareback “screaming over the hills” of her father’s Sharpsburg, Maryland, farm. A favorite of hers was *Come On Seabiscuit*, a 1963 kiddie book. “I read it to death, my little paperback copy,” she says.

She studied at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, but was forced to leave before graduation when she contracted Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. She has struggled with the condition ever since, remain-

ing largely confined to her home. On the irony of writing about physical paragons while being so incapacitated herself, she says, “I’m looking for a way out of here. I can’t have it physically, so I’m going to have it intellectually. It was a beautiful thing to ride *Seabiscuit* in my imagination. And it’s just fantastic to be there alongside Louie Zamperini [hero of *Unbroken*] as he’s breaking the NCAA mile record. People at these vigorous moments in their lives—it’s my way of living vicariously.

She now lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband, Borden Flanagan, a professor of Government at American University. They were college sweethearts and married in 2008.

Book Summary

On a May afternoon in 1943, an Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean and disappeared, leaving only a spray of debris and a slick of oil, gasoline, and blood. Then, on the ocean surface, a face appeared. It was that of a young lieutenant, the plane’s bombardier, who was struggling to a life raft and pulling himself aboard. So began one of the most extraordinary odysseys of the Second World War.

The lieutenant’s name was Louis Zamperini. In boyhood, he’d been a cunning and incorrigible delinquent, breaking into houses, brawling, and fleeing his home to ride the rails. As a teenager, he had channeled his defiance into running, discovering a prodigious talent that had carried him to the Berlin Olympics and within sight of the four-minute mile. But when war had come, the athlete had become an airman, embarking on a

journey that led to his doomed flight, a tiny raft, and a drift into the unknown.

Ahead of Zamperini lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, a foundering raft, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater. Driven to the limits of endurance, Zamperini would answer desperation with ingenuity; suffering with hope, resolve, and humor; brutality with rebellion. His fate, whether triumph or tragedy, would be suspended on the fraying wire of his will.

In her long-awaited new book, Laura Hillenbrand writes with the same rich and vivid narrative voice she displayed in *Seabiscuit*. Telling an unforgettable story of a man’s journey into extremity, *Unbroken* is a testament to the resilience of the human mind, body, and spirit. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

1. Readers and critics alike have described *Unbroken* as gripping, almost impossible to put down. Was that your experience as well? How do you account for the page-turning quality given the grim subject material? Also, would your reading experience have been different if you didn’t know that Zamperini survived? (Or didn’t you know the outcome?)
2. Laura Hillenbrand gives us a moving story, one that brings to life the suffering and courage of not just one man but thousands, whose stories are untold. What is it about Hillenbrand’s writing that saves her book from becoming mired in bathos and melodrama?
3. What do you admire most about Zamperini? What enables him to survive the plane crash and POW ordeal? Does he possess special strengths—personal or physical? Did his training in track, for instance, make a difference in his resilience?
4. How do the POW captives help one another survive? How are they able to communicate with one another? What devices do Zamperini and others use not only to survive but to maintain sanity?
5. What do you find most horrifying about Zamperini’s captivity?
6. Does this book make you wonder at mankind’s capacity for cruelty? What accounts for it—especially on the part of the Japanese, a highly cultured and civilized society? (The same question, of course, has been applied to the Nazis.)